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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/S:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, DBENZE AND AFERNANDEZ,
IIP/G/NEA-SA RWINCHESTER
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SUBJECT: Damascus Media Reaction: Syria/Russia, Syria/Poland,
Syria/Iran, Lebanon, Iraq, Palestinian Territories (10/30)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers today reported President Asad's meeting on October 29 with Former Premier of the Russian Federation Yevgeny Primakov. Talks focused on current international and regional events and bilateral relations. Primakov presented to President Asad the Arabic version of his new book "The Middle East: The Known and The Hidden," and delivered a lecture on Sunday at al-Asad Library in Damascus on the occasion of the book's publication. Primakov said that Israel has to accept the return of the occupied Syrian Golan. However, he asserted, Israel was not ready for such peace.

Papers also reported Foreign Minister Walid al-Mouallem's meeting with Horst Freitag, Director General of the German Foreign Ministry, focusing on cooperation between Syria and Germany to realize security and stability in the region, since Germany will become the head of the European Union early next year. FM al-Mouallem also met with Watold Waszczykowski, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister. Talks focused on Syrian-European relations and means of developing and strengthening them, and on developments in the region.

End of summary.

¶2. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad reviews current regional events and Syrian-Russian cooperation and friendship relations, with Yevgeny Primakov, Former Premier of Russian Federation" (Government-owned Tishreen, 10/30)
"Premier Mohammad Naji Ottri discusses with Iranian Foreign Minister Manouchehr Mottaki strong cooperative relations and prospects of developing them in energy, transport and construction domains" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 10/30)
"FM Mouallem holds talks with German and Polish delegations on Syrian-European relations. Waszczykowski, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister: No solution in the Middle East without Syria" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 10/30)
"New confrontations between Israeli warplanes and German naval forces. Speaker of Lebanese Parliament Berri postpones until Monday consultations among Lebanon's political groups on the formation of a national unity government. Calls for changing the government continue. Hizbollah: The Lebanese refuse to be part of the US project in the region" (Government-owned Tishreen, 10/30)
"Scores of Iraqis killed or wounded in American raids and separate

attacks" (Government-owned Tishreen, 10/30)

"EU Foreign Policy Chief Solana is hopeful for a Palestinian breakthrough" (Government-owned Syria Times, 10/30)

"Colonel Charlie Brown, Democratic candidate for Congress: The US image is worsening increasingly" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 10/30)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

----- "Accusations and Praises" -----

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, commented (10/30): "President Bush and his team of neoconservatives let no media opportunity pass without attacking Syria and accusing it of interfering in Lebanese and Iraqi affairs.... In a press conference on Wednesday [25 October], President Bush leveled direct accusations against Damascus under the headline of the so-called 'permanent US message to Syria.'

"Any reading of US priorities in the region must lead to Israel, because Israel is the only and permanent American priority and Washington's undisputed strategic ally....

"The American condemnation of Syria, therefore, is, by all standards, praise for it. This is exactly one of the main reasons behind popular Arab rallying around Syria and support for its national and pan-Arab positions, especially toward the Arab-Israeli conflict.

"The region desperately needs US evenhandedness and objectivity, not Bush's false accusations. It needs a fair position from the US Administration to help control the tension in the region and establish a just and comprehensive peace. Spiteful words and accusations, on the other hand, will only cause further tension and instability and damage US interests.

"Syria's permanent message to Bush's administration and the United States in general is: Return to global legitimacy, stop interfering

in the domestic affairs of some countries in the region, and use the language of dialogue to achieve cooperation and understanding and solve problems, not the language of force, arrogance, and bias, which, when tried, brought disastrous consequences for the region and the United States alike."

----- "A New European Tone" -----

Abd-al-Fattah al-Awad, Chief Editor of government-owned Al-Thawra, commented (10/30): "There is a positive change in the position of some European countries toward the situation in the Middle East....

"The beginning of the change came through recognition of Syria's role in the region.... There were statements by some European officials on the significance of Syria's role.... Previous policies that relied on isolating Syria have proven a failure....

"However, some European governments still insist on their wrong and intransigent positions, so much so that Britain prevented members of parliament from visiting Syria....

"The new European position amounts to a genuine recognition of the soundness of the positions that Syria has adopted in past years toward extremely sensitive and delicate issues. The evidence is that Syria did not change any of its positions and has maintained a clear vision toward all regional issues....

"But more time is needed to see if this European change is serious or merely a test balloon and political maneuver. But it is clear that the failure of the Bush administration in Iraq, Afghanistan, Palestine, and Lebanon has made Europe reconsider its policy, especially since it was embroiled in those problems and was used to serve the American plan in a way that harmed Europe most....

"As it listens to these European voices and watches these changes closely, Syria knows that its political wisdom led to these results, and that the countries that know how to preserve their dignity and rights ultimately earn recognition of their outstanding roles. As for Europe, we hope the change in tone will be the beginning of a change in language, so that Europe, benefiting from its knowledge of the region and its peoples, can play a role that befits its reputation and principles."

----- "Iraq and the US Congress" -----

Ahmad Dawwa, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (10/30): "There is contradiction in US statements on Iraq.... The

aim is to mislead the American people and distract them as much as possible from what is happening in Iraq prior to the Congressional elections....

"New signals between the lines of the statements that Bush and his top aides are making show the inevitability of the withdrawal of American forces within less than one year, to avoid further American losses, not out of concern for the Iraqi people. The results of the mid-term Congressional elections will define these signals in light of the deteriorating Iraqi situation and the increase in the number of American soldiers killed in Iraq. Here lies the role of Iraqi political leaders in pressing for the adoption of a withdrawal timetable. By doing so, they win two cards simultaneously: First, they meet the demands of the Iraqi people, who reject the occupation, and, second, they curb the security deterioration, because the occupation is one of the main causes of this deterioration."

Corbin